
PREFACE



When the trustees of the Owen Connolly Estate approached me to write a history of Owen Connolly and his legacy, I was intrigued. I knew some details about Connolly's background. I also had received the Connolly bursary for two years when I attended St. Dunstan's University. After considering the proposal and the volume of documents to be reviewed, I asked the trustees to hire researcher Lori Mayne to assist with the project. When the trustees willingly consented to my request, Lori and I began delving into the numerous documents in the provincial archives and the Connolly Estate files.

The research revealed a "rags-to-riches" saga. Owen Connolly immigrated to P.E.I. from Ireland in 1839. He was a teenager with very limited resources. Within two years, he was a tenant farmer in Watervale, where he endured the hardships of pioneer life. Then, in 1852, Owen and his young wife, Ann Hughes, moved to Charlottetown. There, they opened a small general store and an inn. Within a short time, Connolly was wholesaling goods to other merchants, especially at small rural stores. As his wealth grew, he expanded into importing and exporting, banking, and branch stores. In addition to running his mercantile business, Connolly had the uncanny ability to accumulate property in Charlottetown and throughout eastern P.E.I. at bargain prices. With hard work, perseverance, and a brilliant business mind, Connolly became one of the wealthiest people on P.E.I. by the 1880s.

In turbulent economic times, Connolly's entrepreneurial skills were extraordinary. His rise from poor Irish Catholic immigrant to elite businessman was a rare feat, indeed, in P.E.I. history. When Connolly died in 1887, his will revealed that he wanted the profits from his estate to help poor, Irish Catholic boys gain an education. Through his association with Island business leaders, Connolly would have realized that most of these men — generally Protestants of English or Scottish descent — had access to higher

education. Connolly had the foresight to realize that for Irish Catholics to achieve similar success, they would also need the means to attain a better education.

Ann Hughes, Owen's dedicated wife, may have played a much larger role in her husband's success than the official documents indicate. Like most women of her time, Ann would not have had an official voice in the family business. It was only after Owen's death that Ann's strong personality and generous nature emerged in the records. She successfully contested her husband's will to gain a larger share of the estate's assets. She donated her beautiful mansion and waterfront property to the Charlottetown Hospital. As part of the deal, she insisted that her house be utilized as a home for the aged and destitute. Ann was also very generous to her sister Bridget Coady. In one instance, she bought her husband's iconic store on Dorchester Street from the trustees and gave it to her sister to operate as a boarding house.

From 1888 to the present day, trustees have operated and managed the Connolly Estate. Over this period of time, the estate has contributed bursaries to literally thousands of Irish Catholic students attending post-secondary studies. In the earlier years, in particular, this money was a godsend to many students who simply could not afford to further their education. Since most of these students attended St. Dunstan's College, the Connolly money may indeed have saved this institution as it struggled financially in the early 1900s. Through hard work and dedication, the trustees have steered the estate through some tumultuous times and continue to operate on a sound financial basis. Because of Owen Connolly's philanthropic vision, his money continues to be a valuable source of funding for young Irish Catholic men and women who wish to pursue higher education.

This large research project has benefitted from the contributions of a number of individuals who provided insight and information not necessarily available in the official documents. Joan and Leo Walsh, owners of the Connolly farm in Watervale, provided the conveyances of the land transactions between the Connolly family and the province. After walking Lori and me over the land that Owen Connolly farmed in the 1840s, Leo gave us a tour of the Monaghan Road, which Owen would have walked to meet his future bride, Ann Hughes. John Curley of Fort Augustus gave us valuable information on the different owners of the Connolly property and directed us to the Connolly family headstone in the parish cemetery. Cardigan resident and local historian Nora Macdonald shared a photo of the large Connolly store in her village and the details of the disastrous fire that destroyed this property in 1899.

Father Art O'Shea shared his vast knowledge of Roman Catholic church history on P.E.I. and provided information from the diocese archives. Lori and I made several visits to Catherine Hennessey's home, where Catherine freely contributed pictures and background material from her private collection. She was also willing, of course, to furnish us with wise advice. Sean Conlon from County Monaghan, Ireland, connected me to Grace Moloney of the Clogher Historical Society. She graciously provided valuable excerpts from Bishop James Donnelly's diary. When we visited Brendan O'Grady at his home in Charlottetown, he shared his extensive knowledge of Ireland's history and Irish emigration. When I visited George Mullally at his home on the Souris River, he readily contributed a valuable excerpt from Dr. Emmett Mullally's unpublished memoirs.

There are numerous other people and organizations that deserve acknowledgement for their contributions to this book. These include Kevin Rice and staff at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery, the staff at the P.E.I. Public Archives and Records Office, Simon Lloyd and the UPEI Robertson Library, Todd Saunders and Natalie Munn with the City of Charlottetown, the Garden of the Gulf Museum in Montague, the MacNaught History Centre and Archives in Summerside, and Junior Achievement Prince Edward Island.

Joan Sinclair, publications manager of Island Studies Press, diligently guided the book through the publication process. John Flood's professionalism shines through in the final editing of the manuscript. Maggie Lillo displayed her talent with the beautiful layout and design of the book.

There are two people who deserve special recognition in the writing of this book. Lori Mayne used her exceptional research skills to comb through the Connolly documents in the provincial archives and to summarize the information. As well, Lori applied her command of the English language and her writing skills to provide the first edit of the manuscript. With my limited typing skills, I would get bogged down with the mounds of material to transcribe. On these occasions — and there were many — my wife, Catherine, came to the rescue and donated many hours typing the manuscript. To these two talented women, I owe a special thank you.

As always, the author must take responsibility for any error or omissions in the manuscript.